



Tom Leith, acting manager of Big Foot Beach State Park, shows Cynthia Holt some of the pine trees he helped plant at the park in the late 1980s. Holt is active in Big Foot Friends, a group recently formed to help support the park.

Friends join in supporting Big Foot Beach State Park

BY MARY A. KANE

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LAKE GENEVA — Big Foot Beach State Park now has a friends group similar to those already supporting most other Wisconsin state parks.

The brainchild of Dave and Sarah Schuster, the Big Foot Friends group is officially being launched Saturday, with what is being billed as the First Annual Turkey Trot Fun Run and Walk.

"Our family has lived near the park for a couple of generations and I grew up playing there," said Sarah Schuster. "For some time, we've been looking for a way to help with trail maintenance and hold some functions there."

Recently, she and Tom Leith, the park's acting manager, were talking and "the lightbulb went on" almost simultaneously in both their heads, Schuster said.

"I knew about other park friends groups around the state and we got to talking and just decided to go ahead with it," she said.

Schuster's cousin, Cynthia Holt, who has an extensive background in nonprofit organizations, has been instrumental in helping establish Big Foot Friends as a registered nonprofit.

"All this just happened a month ago. The paperwork is still in the works. My previous work in nonprofits includes a YMCA camp, an art camp my mother runs in Wyoming and I was the development director for another nonprofit in New Hampshire," Holt said. "We want this to be a way to get people outdoors and to know the hidden treasures of Lake Geneva. We want to get more people to use the park in a good way year-round."

"The Turkey Trot is helping make people aware that we have gotten started. We're starting to talk with other people to get volunteers and others to serve on the board."

Schuster and Holt said they already have several events and groups in mind to help create community wide interest in the park.

"This is something we just knew we wanted to do. It's a grassroots effort. We have someone who's the president of an area pre-school who wants to be on the board. Some of our

Turkey Trot Fun Run and Walk

■ **What:** First annual Turkey Trot Fun Run and Walk, 5K. Also Junior Gobbler half-mile event for those 12 years old and younger.

■ **When:** Saturday, Nov. 19

■ **Where:** Big Foot Beach State Park

■ **How:** Registration is \$15 for adults and \$7 for children when registering by Wednesday. After that, registration fees are \$18 for adults and \$10 for children. Register at Clear Water Outdoor, 744 Main St. All participants can pick up their race bags, including maps and Turkey Trot T-shirt, Friday from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Clear Water Outdoor or the morning of the race. Race day registration opens at 9 a.m. at the park.

■ **Why:** Partial proceeds from run will benefit Big Foot Friends

relatives have expressed an interest. Even people in the business world elsewhere but whose heartstrings go back to the park," Schuster said.

Badger High School athletes run in the park and she hopes to see other school groups use it more as well, including the Leadership Dynamics class at Badger and science classes that will have a ready-made outdoor classroom.

"We hope to have someone from the school district on our board as well," Schuster said.

"It's just a matter of getting people to the park. That land is a treasure. It's huge, more than 250 acres. As more and more development comes into the area, it's going to become even more important to be good stewards of Big Foot," said Holt.

Schuster said plans are in the works to bring Scout groups and environmental studies classes to the park for global positioning and orienteering sessions. In addition, they're looking at what other state park friends groups are doing and envision eventually organizing leisure activities such as moonlight snowshoeing, campfire gatherings and other events.

One of the park's neighbors is Lake Geneva Youth Camp, which shares a lagoon with the park. LGYC executive director Denny McKendrick couldn't be more enthusiastic about the formation of Big Foot Friends.

"We've had a good relationship with the park over the years and have even shared equipment with them when they needed something. We consider ourselves friends and neighbors. The Friends sounds like a good idea and we would welcome anything that would

help them. We certainly would help with trail maintenance by supplying volunteers. We use the park for our summer programs and cross country skiing for guests in the winter," McKendrick said.

"The Friends can be a positive force that supports and promotes the park," said ranger Steve Rawson. "It will be a partnership between the staff and friends. It will help us with projects and be beneficial to those who exercise their talents. Most people have a need for friends, and so does the park."

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